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Endtime Earthquakes, Pestilences, Famines & Disasters: When? – Part II

By Wilfred Hahn

In Part I of this series on prophesied natural disasters, focusing upon earthquakes, we had reviewed the “earthquakes in diverse places” mentioned by Christ. We also examined the first four of the five apocalyptic seismic events mentioned in the book of Revelation. Crucially, we had concluded that the earthquakes mentioned by Christ are not the same as the ones mentioned in Revelation. We continue our review of the apocalyptic earthquakes.



The fifth and greatest earthquake of all time occurs at the time of the seventh bowl (or vial) judgment. It most certainly is a global earthquake, said to affect the “islands.” It again is accompanied by “voices, thunders, lightnings,” and again hail (this time, precipitation the weight of a talent, which is the equivalent of 25.5 kilograms or 56 pounds).

And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice

out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great





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hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great (Revelation 16:17-21).

This final and most catastrophic earthquake of all history is also the frequent topic of Old Testament prophets. It coincides with the final judgment, taking place at the time of Armageddon (possibly also the quashing of Gog) and the smashing of all the capital cities of the nations, including Babylon the Great. It is just prior to the restoration of Israel. A number of prophets speak of this time. Says Joel:

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel (Joel 3:14-16).

Haggai also is given a vision of this time:

And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts (Haggai 2:22-23).

This last earthquake of judgment, positioned at the very end and at the time of Armageddon, is also confirmed by Isaiah in several Scriptures:

Therefore the LORD's anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. He lifts up a banner for the distant nations, he whistles for those at the ends of the earth. Here they come, swiftly and speedily! (Isaiah 5:25-26, NIV). Also, [...] The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls—never to rise again (Isaiah 24:18-20).

We have hardly exhausted the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets, not to mention connecting them to the judgment of Babylon the Great. See also these Scriptures: Isaiah 29:6-7 and Haggai 2:6-8, Ezekiel 26:15, 31:16, Zechariah 2:7-9.

Having briefly reviewed the five earthquakes of the Tribulation period mentioned in Revelation, we note that they are not the earthquakes that Christ told us would happen. The first and fifth earthquakes—bracketing the other three—in this writer's opinion, represent both the start and end of the Great Tribulation period (the second period of 42 months), framing the time of God's wrath in the form of supernatural events.

As a matter of interest, this perspective on the timing of Revelation's earthquakes aligns with the opinion of a number of scholars, who view the events of the "beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24) in parallel with the first five "seal" judgments of Revelation. As such, the sixth and seventh seals would then occur in the second half of the Tribulation.



Prophecy Keys to Earthquakes

It goes without saying that there remains much debate between scholars that endorse the pre-tribulational view, as to the times of the various judgments mentioned in Revelation (seals, trumpets and bowls). We can hardly contribute to this debate. However, in the matter of earthquakes, here are some of the “keys” that must be considered.

1. In the book of Revelation, there is no mention of earthquakes before the time of the sixth seal. All five earthquakes mentioned occur from that point forward.

2. All earthquakes mentioned in Revelation are of “divine” or “heavenly” origin. None are natural phenomena such as are occurring today or as may be the “earthquakes in diverse places” that Christ indicated. All are divinely enacted, either through Christ or angels.

3. All prophesied earthquakes in the Old Testament are specific to the “day of the Lord” ... in other words, those that are caused by divine judgment, and clearly referring to the time of God’s wrath. (Possibly there is one exception, this being the point where Christ’s feet alight upon the mount of Olives, splitting the mountain in Zechariah 14:4.)

4. All the earthquakes prophesied in the Old Testament as part of the time of wrath are all specific events, most of them global in scope. They are truly apocalyptic and not part of a generic group of earthquakes that occur in “diverse places” on the earth.

Next, we should note the differences between the earthquakes that were prophesied by Christ (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) and the specific ones mentioned in the Old Testament, Revelation and the other New Testament writers.

1. The earthquakes prophesied by Christ are non-specific to location and



Tsunami flooding on the Sendai Airport runway, Japan

number, in that there are multiple earthquakes in various places. By contrast, all five earthquakes mentioned in the book of Revelation are singular and specific events.

2. The earthquakes mentioned by Christ occur during the period that is called the “beginning of sorrows.” The three accounts of this prophecy in Matthew, Mark and Luke are all in agreement on this point. The earthquakes mentioned in Revelation, on the other hand, all occur at the time of the sixth seal and thereafter. That period is not the “beginning of sorrows,” but rather much later, likely (as in this writer’s opinion) the Great Tribulation period (the second half of the Tribulation period).

3. Several of the prophecies involving earthquakes in Revelation, correspond to earthquakes prophesied in the Old Testament and elsewhere in the New Testament; whereas the “earthquakes in diverse places,” associated with “nations rising against nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms,” along with pestilences and famines, do not.

Are Earthquakes Increasing Today?

Finally, let’s consider this most intriguing question: has the incidence of earthquakes been increasing in recent years and decades? To be scientifically valid—not going beyond what can be validly ascertained from statistics—the answer is “probably not.” This conclusion may be shocking to some. Indeed, this writer has received numerous aggravated re-

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Child victim of the 1921-1923 Famine in Soviet Russia.

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sponses to this conclusion in the past.

Apparently, some Christians hold great comfort in the notion that earthquakes are already increasing in severity and frequency today. To them, this is seen as a sign that the Lord's return is near. However, the plain truth is that anyone using proper statistical methods (and, it should be added, adhering to what the Bible actually says) cannot conclusively state that earthquakes have increased in recent times. Seismologists (who are experts in this topic, and other Bible students) have come to the same conclusion.

Consider this quote from the website of the United States Geological Survey (USGS), "In 1931, there were about 350 [seismograph] stations operating in the world; today, there are more than 8,000 stations and the data now comes in rapidly from these stations by electronic mail, internet and satellite."

As such, statistics gathering and reporting has served to increase the earthquake counts as well as the perception of their incidence. In reality, occurrences have not risen, just the reporting of earthquakes of smaller size. Earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 (on the Richter scale) or greater—the ones that historically were noticeably cataclysmic, and most likely to be reported—have remained fairly constant. In fact, one earthquake per year exceeding 9.0 on the Richter scale (as was the strength of the recent seismic occurrence in Japan) is considered normal. There are other independently corroborated studies that have come to the same conclusion.

For those who are inclined to disregard statistical validity and to interpret

seismic data in a fashion more agreeable to their preferred opinions on the matter of earthquakes, they will discover that similar problems will arise with the other phenomena that Christ said would occur "during the beginning of sorrows."

We recall that along with earthquakes, there would also occur famines, pestilences, and that nations would rise against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms (Matthew 24:7). Of course, over history, the world has always been subject to wars, famines and pestilences. Should we therefore interpret Christ's statements to indicate that these phenomena during the "beginning of sorrows" will be much the same as usual? Such an interpretation would not be reasonable either. If so, there would be no need for Christ to give us these indicators to identify a period of heightening sorrows.

Then, can wars, pestilences and famines be said to be increasing in severity and frequency today? The evidence would suggest no ... at least, not yet. In the case of wars, they can be shown to be decreasing in recent decades. For example, a recent report of the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2011) concludes the following:

Interstate war has declined dramatically since the two world wars of the first half of the 20th century. Major civil conflicts (those with more than 1,000 battle deaths a year) increased during the postcolonial and Cold War era, peaking in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since 1991-92, when there were 21 active major civil wars, the number has steadily fallen to less than 10 each year since 2002.

Other research organizations have expressed similar opinions. In the case of pestilences and famines, we can well point to reasons why these may sharply



increase in the future. However, the reality is that their incidence around the world has decreased sharply over the past century or so.

At this point in history, both for reasons of limited data and statistical validity, a rise in the frequency and severity of earthquakes cannot be proven conclusively. Confirming this view that the time of “earthquakes in diverse places” is not yet, is the fact that none of the other tandem phenomena of famine, pestilences and wars can be shown as having increased.

Should this really be seen as a disappointment? Is prophecy therefore invalidated? May that never be the case. For one, as we have shown, this conclusion does not overturn Scripture. Our study to this point would argue that the earthquakes that Christ mentions occur during the first half of the Tribulation period ... not before, nor after. Moreover, Christ’s return and the Rapture are not delayed by this conclusion. Why? Because the Rapture is “signless” and has always been imminent.

Points to Ponder – Part II

The Lord’s return is not delayed at all by the fact that earthquakes are not yet increasing today. We must conclude that much greater earthquake activity lies ahead for the world. If our interpretation of Matthew 24 and the corresponding accounts of Revelation is correct, a pronounced increase—conclusively noticeable for all of mankind to recognize—will occur during the first half of the Tribulation period. We can conclude that there will be many all around the world. Moreover, these seismic events are not specifically mentioned in the book of Revelation, nor are they part of the “divinely” triggered earthquakes that



Mount of Olives, Israel

are instruments of Gods’ wrath in the second half of the Tribulation period.

As disastrous and powerful as the recent Japanese earthquake may have been, it will pale in comparison to the worst yet to come. Not only is the heightened earthquake activity mentioned by Christ yet in the future, but also the biggest earthquakes of all time have yet to occur. With respect to the last one, John the Revelator tells us this: “[...] No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake” (Revelation 16:18).

Most wonderfully for Israel and the remaining Christians at the end of the Tribulation period, is the advent of one more earthquake. This is a local one, occurring on the Mount of Olives.

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south (Zechariah 14:4).

This occurs at the time that Israel’s Messiah finally returns. As his feet touch the Mount of Olives, the hill splits in two. Water flows out of the temple mount, and the new Millennial period begins (Revelation 22:1). (MC)

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